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METC Medical Laboratory Technician Program: Fast-paced Course in High-demand Career Field

BY VJOHNSON – DECEMBER 30, 2013

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Story by Lori Newman, Joint Base San Antonio



Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Lisa Mostler stains a glass slide with Gram's stain, used to differentiate bacterial species into large groups (Gram-positive and Gram-negative).



Army Pvt. Devon Moore streaks bacteria for isolation onto agar medium at the San Antonio Military Medical Center as part of his phase two training.

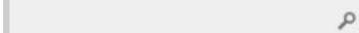
SAN ANTONIO – About 70 percent of the decisions made in a hospital are based on laboratory data, explained Lt. Cmdr. Trent Freeman, director of the Army and Navy Medical Laboratory Technician Program at the Medical Education and Training Campus.

"That's significant; that tells you the importance of the trade, the skill and the education our students are receiving. What they do affects patient care."

The MLT program, accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science, is 52 weeks for the Army and 53 weeks for the Navy. The program is divided into two phases – the didactic, or classroom instruction, phase at METC and a clinical phase done at various hospitals throughout the continental United States. The METC Medical Laboratory Technician program provides education and training in the major disciplines of the clinical laboratory including clinical chemistry, hematology, immunohematology, immunology, parasitology, urinalysis, blood donor center operations, specimen collection and processing, and laboratory operations and management.

"There is a high demand for MLTs and this is a very challenging program," Freeman said.

Students are expected to apply critical thinking. Graduates will demonstrate the ability to comprehend, apply, and analyze information relevant to the role of the medical laboratory technician. They will be technically proficient in all



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skills required to perform the duties of a laboratory technician and exhibit the desired ethical behaviors consistent with professional expectations for medical laboratory technicians. Phase one of the program is about 70 percent didactic and 30 percent hands on.

“Most of the hands on training during phase one is to enhance the students learning within the didactic portion of the program. It flips when the students go through phase two,” Freeman said.

“It’s a very intense program but the instructors do their best to explain everything and make sure you understand everything they have taught,” said Seaman Daniella Senior, a phase one student.
Pfc. Eric Wilson says the work load and pace of the program is demanding but he loves how challenging it is.

“I love science. I always wanted to work in a laboratory and this was a great opportunity to get there,” Wilson said.

Duties performed by a MLT can range from a basic blood draw to performing cultures and identifying organisms or selecting the appropriate blood product for transfusion and testing that blood product for various types of diseases.

“The most challenging thing is remembering all the different organisms we see,” said Seaman Lisa Mosttler who is in her clinical phase at San Antonio Military Medical Center, one of the Army’s 22 phase two sites.

The Navy has 11 phase two sites. During phase two students are also evaluated on their professionalism along with their technical ability to perform the skills learned in the classroom.

“Professional behavior is extraordinarily important for us,” Freeman said. “There are certain attributes we expect out of health care providers within the military and within the health care field in general.”

Upon completion of the program, Army and Navy students earn 60 semester hours to apply toward an associate degree and they are eligible to take the national certification examination given by the Board of Certification of the American Society for Clinical Pathology.

“That is the gold standard for certification in the medical laboratory profession,” Freeman said.

“We have graduated about 888 students – 576 soldiers and 312 sailors. Out of 888 students, 72 percent have passed the national certification exam.”

“There are so many different aspects of a medical lab tech,” said phase two student Pfc. Gina Esposito. “You get to help people and it’s really hands on. It’s something that makes an impact on someone’s life.”

“Phase one of the Air Force program is four months long and phase two is nine months,” said Capt. Kathiuska Lamb-Rodriguez, AF MLT program director. “The Air Force has 12 phase two sites throughout the United States.”

Airmen receive 76 semester hours from the Community College of the Air Force once they have completed their MLT program.

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